

Chapter I — The Pope's Letter

The Lord's Day — as Sunday was called from Apostolic Times.” Thus commences Pope John Paul II's Apostolic Letter, *Dies Domini*, issued July 7, 1998. The Pope provides a reference in order to document his initial assertion. His reference is Revelation 1:10. This Scriptural passage states:

I [John] was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet.

It will be seen that this verse of Scripture, while mentioning the Lord's Day, does not in any particular indicate which day of the week is the Lord's Day. One may read the context of the Biblical passage, and he will find no elucidation of the term. Since the term, “the Lord's Day” occurs nowhere else in Scripture, it will not assist us to seek another reference containing the term “Lord's Day” in order to enable us to discover the Biblical meaning of the term.

Yet the only safe ground for a sincere student of the Bible is to permit the Bible to interpret itself. God in His goodness has not left this matter in doubt. In clear, unequivocal terms He has revealed to us which day is the Lord's Day. The New Testament specifies the day which is the Lord's Day in two passages of Scripture:

For the Son of man is Lord even of the sabbath day (Matthew 12:8).

And he said unto them, That the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath (Luke 6:5).

Plainly the Sabbath day *is* the Lord's Day. The Bible itself has cited this fact. But a new question arises: Which day is the Sabbath? The context of these two texts reveals that the Jews were accusing the disciples of sabbathbreaking in that they rubbed ears of corn in their hands. Clearly the day referred to was the day the Jews identified as the Sabbath.

If we are sincere searchers for Biblical truth, then we must permit the Scripture to identify the day which the Jews hallowed as the Sabbath. Once more the Bible is specific. Jesus was crucified on the day which many Christians designate as Good Friday. The Jews named that day the preparation day. Speaking of the day of Christ's death, Luke recorded:

And that day was the preparation, and the sabbath drew on (Luke 23:54).

Thus the Sabbath day of the Jews was the day after Friday.

This fact is confirmed in Matthew's account of the resurrection which occurred on the day many Christians, including Roman Catholics, uphold as Easter Sunday. Matthew repeated Mary Magdalene's visit to the empty tomb thus:

In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre (Matthew 28:1).

Manifestly the Sabbath day upon which the Jews worshipped was the day between Friday and Sunday. That day was Saturday.

Therefore, as we review Matthew 12:8 and Luke 6:5 quoted above, we are compelled to conclude that the Lord's Day, plainly identified in Scripture, is Saturday, the seventh day of the week. This

causes no surprise, for the fourth commandment, written with God's own hand plainly states:

Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: But *the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God*: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it (Exodus 20:8-11, emphasis supplied).

So God, Himself, designated Saturday, the seventh day of the week, as the Lord's Day. Thus Revelation 1:10 is simply stating that John was in vision on the Sabbath, the seventh day of the week. The Bible, therefore, testifies that the Pope's initial statement is an incredible lapse from sound scholarship.

The initial statement in the Pope's Apostolic Letter also reveals a remarkable alteration in the position of the Roman Catholic stance on Sunday worship. Unlike some Protestants who have sought to uphold Sunday-sanctity on the basis of apostolic tradition, this has not been the practice of Roman Catholics. Let us review two authoritative statements of the Roman Catholic Church.

The first states:

Question — Which is the Sabbath day? **Answer** — Saturday is the Sabbath day. **Question** — Why do we observe Sunday instead of Saturday? **Answer** — We observe Sunday instead of Saturday because the Catholic church, in the Council of Laodicea (364 A.D.) transferred the solemnity from Saturday to Sunday (Peter Geiermann [a Roman Catholic priest], *The Convert's Catechism of Catholic Doctrine*, second edition, p. 50).

The Roman Catholic Mirror emphatically discovered no Biblical evidence for the substitution of Sunday for Saturday for Sabbath observance.

[We have] disposed of every text to be found in the New Testament referring to the Sabbath (Saturday), and to the first day of the week (Sunday); and [here] shown conclusively from these texts, that, so far, not a shadow of pretext can be found in the Sacred Volume for the Biblical substitution of Sunday for Saturday. Catholic Mirror, Sept. 16, 1893

Here we see that the Roman Catholic Church has long claimed that it altered the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday in the year 336 A.D. That was certainly *not* apostolic times, as the Pope states in his Apostolic Letter. Almost two-and-a-half centuries had passed since the death of the last apostle until the Council of Laodicea convened. Millions of Roman Catholics have in their possession catechisms which assent that the *Council* altered the day of worship and not the apostles. These Catholics must be confused by the Pope's latest declaration on the matter. Strange indeed is this altered claim for a church which is reputed never to have changed.

A second catechism, approved by the Roman Catholic Church and authored by a priest, also raises questions concerning the commencement of the Pope's Apostolic Letter, for it would seem that the Pope is shrinking from the ecclesiastical authority which Roman Catholics have based upon the church's ability to alter the day of worship. This catechism states:

Question: Do you have any other way of proving that the church has power to institute festivals and precepts? **Answer:** Had she not such power she could not have done that which all modern religionists agree with her, she could not have substituted the observance of Sunday the first day of the week, for the observance of Saturday, a change for which there is no Scriptural authority (Stephen Keenan, *A Doctrinal Catechism*).

Stephen Keenan correctly states that there is no Scriptural authority for Sunday observance. It would have been strange indeed if Sunday was the new Lord's Day and that not one of the eight authors of the New Testament stated this as a fact. It would have been an

incredible oversight in the 260 chapters of the New Testament that no mention of such a dramatic alteration was provided.

Indeed, the author of Revelation, the apostle John, the only Bible writer to use the term, "the Lord's Day" (Revelation 1:10), mentioned Sunday twice in his gospel (John 20:1; 20:19). Both these verses refer to the day of Christ's resurrection. Surely if ever there was a time to call the first day of the week the Lord's Day, if it were appropriate, then this was the day. But John chose not to do so. Why? Because he well knew that the Lord's day was the Sabbath. Remember, John wrote his gospel between 80 – 90 A.D. If it had been his habit for 50 – 60 years after Jesus' death to address the Sunday as "the Lord's Day" he certainly would have used this term in his gospel.

In corroboration of *A Doctrinal Catechism*, The Catholic Mirror, which was the official Catholic newspaper of the Archdiocese of Baltimore, Maryland, USA, over which the eminent Cardinal Gibbons presided, stated,

The Catholic Church for over one thousand years before the existence of a Protestant, by virtue of her divine mission, changed the day from Saturday to Sunday." (1893, p. 29)

In fact, a few Christians in the mid-second century had adopted the pagan day of the Roman Empire in order to escape confusion with Jews during periods of anti-Semitism in the Roman Empire. Justin Martyr in 155 was the first to mention this practice, but it was not a general practice in Christendom and was based upon fear of persecution, not Scriptural mandate.

The Catholic Mirror states its conclusion emphatically.

Hence the conclusion is inevitable; viz., that of those who follow the Bible as their guide, the Israelites and Seventh-day Adventists, have the exclusive weight of evidence on their side, whilst the Biblical Protestant has not a word in self-defence for his substitution of Sunday for Saturday. *Catholic Mirror*, Sept. 9, 1893.

We must remember that every book of the New Testament was written decades after the death of Jesus. Eight times the first day of the week (Sunday) is mentioned (Matthew 28:1; Mark 16:2,9; Luke 24:1; John 20:1,19; Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2). Not once is it referred to as the Lord's Day. Not once! The first six of these texts simply state that Christ rose from the dead on Sunday. The passage in 1 Corinthians merely admonishes the Christians to gather their offerings on Sunday.

Many Protestants, seeking to escape the Roman Catholic taunt that the acceptance of Sunday sacredness is an implied acceptance of the claimed papal authority to institute ecclesiastical festivals and precepts (laws) not found in Scripture, grasp at Acts 20:7 as the Biblical support of their Sunday worship.

Let us examine this passage of Scripture:

And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight (Acts 20:7).

There is no question that the believers met on Sunday. Unquestionably they "broke bread" on the Sunday. This fact has frequently been used as evidence that a communion service was held and thus Sunday must have been held sacred by Paul and the believers at Troas. This matter merits investigation.

Paul, the biblical record states, "continued his speech until midnight" (Acts 20:7). At about this time a tragedy occurred when a young man, Eutychus, fell asleep and fell from the window of the third loft and was killed (v. 9). Paul went downstairs and, through the power of God, Eutychus was restored to life (v. 10). Undoubtedly this procedure took some minutes, and it was the very early hours of the second day of the week (Monday) when Paul returned upstairs to the room where he had been preaching. It is pertinent to the matter under discussion to record that which occurred on that early Monday morning:

When he therefore was come up again, and had broken bread, and eaten, and talked a long while, even till break of day, so he departed (Acts 20: 11).

Thus Scripture testifies that Paul “had broken bread” on Monday morning. Yet no Christian uses this fact to support Monday sacredness. The fact that bread was broken also on Monday morning seriously diminishes the use of Acts 20:7 as evidence of Sunday sacredness.

But this is not all. What does the term “to break bread” mean? Once more Scripture comes to our aid as its own interpreter:

And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart (Acts 2:46).

Notice what this text reveals. Firstly, the early Christians, filled with the power of Pentecost, broke bread daily. So whatever the term “to break bread” meant, it provides absolutely no basis for selecting one of the seven days of the week as the special day of worship, for bread was broken on all days of the week.

Secondly, we have in this passage, clear evidence of the Biblical meaning of the term “to break bread.” In other Scripture verses, this meaning includes the participation in the communion service. But plainly, this Scripture states, in qualifying this breaking of bread, that “they did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart.” The word “meat” as used in the 17th and 18th centuries simply meant “food.”

But there is yet another matter that requires our attention as we seek to understand this matter. If the day upon which the communion service was conducted indicated the timing of Sabbath observance, then surely we would follow Christ’s example and keep holy the day on which He instituted this ordinance. Since the first Lord’s Supper was held on the evening before Christ’s crucifixion, such a concept would lead us to observe Thursday as our day of worship. No Chris-

tian follows such an absurdity.

Thus Acts 20:7 as a valid support for Sunday sacredness falls on three counts — 1) the breaking of bread was a daily matter; 2) the Scriptural meaning of the term was to enjoy a meal; and 3) Christ instituted the Lord's Supper on a Thursday evening. In citing these three irrefutable facts, we have not mentioned that the Jewish day commenced, not at midnight, but at sunset. Thus long before midnight, by Jewish (and Scriptural) reckoning, Paul had been preaching on the second day of the week, Monday. Manifestly, the use of Acts 20:7 does not present a strong case for Sunday sacredness and, indeed, is quite invalid as a Scriptural argument for Sunday observance.*

Once more, we would remind each reader that at no time do the Biblical writers refer to the first day of the week as the Lord's Day. Constantly they refer to the Sabbath, never once referring to it as the former Sabbath or in any other way indicating that the seventh day of the week no longer held validity as God's holy day. That would be remarkable if Christ's death altered His law since, as we have stated, every book of the New Testament was written decades after Christ's death. Indeed, the seventh-day Sabbath is mentioned in the New Testament no less than 60 times.

In the second paragraph of his Apostolic Letter, the Pope further makes an assertion which no doubt has proven puzzling to many readers. He states,

* We have assumed that Luke, the author of the book Acts of the Apostles, was using the Roman reckoning of time rather than the Jewish. The Bible is not clear on whether this episode in the book Acts of the Apostles was using Jewish or Roman time. The Jews commenced each new day at sunset and the Romans commenced it at midnight.

Three matters inclined us to believe that this meetings occurred on Sunday evening, not Saturday evening as it would have been had the reference been based on the Jewish mode of reckoning days.

1. Luke would have been raised with the Roman form of dividing days. He was the author of the book of Acts.
2. Even John, who was a Jew, used the Roman method of reckoning. The evening he mentioned as the first day of the week could not have been Saturday evening, as Christ had not yet risen from the dead.

"Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were

Rightly, then, the Psalmist's cry is applied to Sunday: 'This is the day which the Lord has made: let us rejoice and be glad in it' (Psalms 118:24).

Children still in elementary school, if raised in a Christian or Jewish home, will know that the Jewish nation observed Saturday, the seventh day specified in God's Law, as their sacred day. There can be no question whatsoever that the psalmist in this verse of his ancient Hebrew hymn is referring to Saturday. This passage can in no way be rightly applied to Sunday. To do so is to wrest the Scriptures.

Thus the Apostolic Letter, *Dies Domini*, commences in such a fashion that one is left questioning the care with which it has been prepared. This is the more surprising when we consider that there is no doubt whatsoever that some of the highest intellects in the Roman Catholic Church and in the Vatican would have assisted the Pope in the preparation of this letter.

This matter is not ameliorated by the fact that in his fifth paragraph, the Pope makes another false claim. He states that "the fundamental importance of Sunday has been recognized through two thousand years of history." If, as *The Convert's Catechism of Catholic Doctrine* asserts, the Catholic church, in the Council of Laodicea (336 A.D.) transferred the solemnity from Saturday to Sunday then the very longest period Sunday has been recognized as the Sabbath is 1663 years (at the date of publication of this book). Even this period

shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you." (John 20:19)

3. The Bible plainly states that when Paul preached on the evening of the first day of the week he planned to sail "on the morrow." If the Jewish reckoning was in use, then Paul would have been sailing not on the morrow but later the same day. (See Acts 20:7).

However, if it were Saturday evening to which Luke referenced as would be so if the Jewish commencement of the day was here indicated, then it would have been Saturday evening and not Sunday upon which those gathered initially broke bread. This would provide absolutely no basis for the use of this passage of Scripture as a Biblical mandate for Sunday worship, for Saturday evening is most certainly not a portion of the present Sunday which commences at midnight.

is confined largely to the Roman Catholic Church. As Benjamin Wilkinson, in his classic work, *Truth Triumphant*, documents, the seventh-day Sabbath was upheld in Scotland until 1206, in India until the 16th century, Ethiopia until the 17th century, in Eastern Europe until the 16th century, and in China at least to the 14th century.

In 1956, the book, *The Faith of Millions* was published and sold in Catholic bookstores. It asserted (page 473) that

...since Saturday, and not Sunday, is specified in the Bible, isn't it curious that non-Catholics who profess to take their religion directly from the Bible and not from the church, observe Sunday instead of Saturday.

In December 1893, the eminent American Cardinal, Archbishop Gibbons, asserted that there were just two alternatives in this matter. Either one accepts the Bible as the basis of one's faith, a position accepted by Protestantism, and thus keep Saturday holy, or accept the Catholic dogma of the authority of the church, and thus worship on Sunday.

Cardinal Gibbons' claim is valid. Numerous Protestant authorities concur that Saturday is the true Sabbath and that there is no apostolic or Biblical basis for Sunday observance. It is prudent that we document a selection of these sources. Emphasis supplied.

There was and is a commandment to keep holy the Sabbath day, but that Sabbath Day was not Sunday. It will be said, however, and with some show of triumph, that the Sabbath was transferred from the seventh to the first day of the week....Where can the record of such a transaction be found? Not in the New Testament — absolutely not....Of course, I quite well know that Sunday did come into use in early Christian history as a religious day, as we learn from the Christian Fathers, and other sources. But WHAT A PITY that it comes branded with the mark of paganism, and christened with the name of the sun god, when adopted and sanctioned by the papal apostasy, and bequeathed as a sacred legacy to Protestantism! — Dr. Edward T. Hiscox (author of the *Baptist Manual*), *Source Book*, pp. 513,514.

Centuries of the Christian era passed away before Sunday was observed by the Christian church as the Sabbath. History does not furnish us with a SINGLE PROOF or INDICATION that it was AT ANY TIME so observed previous to the Sabbatical edict of Constantine in 321 A.D. — Sir William Domville, of the Church of England, *The Sabbath or An Examination of the Six Texts*, p. 291.

So some have tried to build the observance of Sunday upon apostolic command, whereas the apostles gave no command on the matter.... The truth is, as soon as we appeal to the 'Litera scripta' (the literal writing) of the Bible, the Sabbatarians have the best of the argument. — *The Presbyterian At Work*, editorial, April 19, 1883.

It is true, there is no positive command for infant baptism...nor is there any for keeping the first day of the week. — *The Methodist Theological Compendium*.

It is quite clear that however rigidly or devotedly we may spend Sunday, we are not keeping the Sabbath. The Sabbath was founded on a specific, divine command. We can plead no such command for the observance of Sunday.... There is not a single line in the New Testament to suggest that we incur any penalty by violating the supposed sanctity of Sunday. — Dr. W. R. Dale (Congregational), *The Ten Commandments*, pp. 106, 107.

The observance of the Lord's day (Sunday) is founded not on any command of God, but on the authority of the church. — Augsburg Confession of Faith (Lutheran).

The festival of Sunday, like all other festivals, was always only a human ordinance, and it was far from the intentions of the apostles to establish a divine command in this respect, far from them and from the early apostolic church to transfer the laws of the Sabbath to Sunday. — Johann Neander (Episcopalian), *General History of the Christian Religion and Church*, p. 186.

Why then has the Pope adopted a novel approach in attempting to vindicate Sunday observance, not from church authority, but rather from Scripture? Only he and perhaps his inner circle of counselors could explain this remarkable alteration of course. It surely is unnec-

essary for faithful Roman Catholics. They have already accepted papal authority to alter and enact ecclesiastical festivals and laws, without Scriptural warrant. Perhaps the Pope sees in the increasing clamor for Sunday laws amongst Evangelical Protestants, that now is the time to woo them to his cause by presenting his call for similar laws upon grounds which will appeal to these Protestants by claiming to appeal to holy writ.

Whatever the Pope's motive is, he has placed his own church in a frightful dilemma. Only time will tell how he or his successor will attempt to extricate the Roman Catholic Church from this self-created quandary.

While ever the Papacy asserted the fact that the seventh-day Sabbath was observed in apostolic times, and that this practice continued even in the western Christian Church until the fourth century, it was possible to claim papal authority for the church's alteration. Sunday worship was declared to be the mark of that authority. By appealing to Scripture and apostolic practice, the Pope has forfeited that claimed authority and vested that authority in Scripture. But since Scripture does not support his claim, he has led the Roman Catholic Church into a theological quagmire. As numerous Roman Catholic leaders have correctly claimed, there is no Biblical basis for Sunday observance, absolutely none! Therefore the Pope has placed the sacred observance of Sunday upon an extremely weak platform. He has opened a door to demonstrate the vulnerability of the Christian churches' position on this matter, for in truth, Sunday observance, as the author of the *Baptist Manual*, Dr. Edward Hiscox, stated, is based upon no better principle than

...it comes branded with the mark of paganism, christened with the name of the sun god, when adopted and sanctioned by papal apostasy, and bequeathed as a sacred legacy to Protestantism (*Source Book*, p. 514).

While scattered instances of Christians worshipping on the pa-

gan day of the sun in order to escape persecution engineered by the mistaken concept that they were Jewish have been documented, Sabbathkeeping was generally upheld until the conversion of Constantine, Emperor of the Roman Empire in 321 A.D. The depth of his conversion from paganism is not for us to judge. Suffice it to record that he advocated, after his conversion, that the day of the sun, Sunday, be observed.

The Pope cannot simultaneously hold two mutually exclusive positions. Sunday sanctity has for centuries been the pillar of the Roman Catholic Church's claim to ecclesiastical authority. This claim has ever been based upon the fact that the Bible contains no mandate for Sunday observance. It has been Rome's stated position that

had she no such power, she could not have done that in which all modern religionists agree with her, she could not have substituted the observance of Sunday, the first day of the week, for the observance of Saturday, a change for which there is no Scriptural authority (Stephen Keenan, *A Doctrinal Catechism*).

Either the Papacy has to renounce its usurped ecclesiastical authority and support its new claim to discover a Biblical basis for Sunday observance, or it must continue to assert its supreme authority in matters ecclesiastical and admit that Sunday worship is its own invention, devoid of Scriptural confirmation.

As we have demonstrated, the Pope's Apostolic Letter provides a faulted introduction to his new approach, and the remainder of the letter fares no better.

If the Roman Catholic Church resorts to its former position that Scripture provides no basis for Sunday observance and that it was not practiced or advocated in apostolic times, then the man it claims to be its first pontiff, the apostle Peter, did not share the practice nor exert the authority usurped by subsequent popes.

The Apostolic Letter, *Dies Domini*, has placed the Roman Catholic Church in a most difficult position.